

September 2003

Frank W. Nelte

WAS JESUS CHRIST GOD IN THE FLESH?

Following on my recent article about The Nature of Jesus Christ, there are further questions and further Scriptures that should also be addressed. That is what I would like to do in this current article.

Let's start with the question:

While Jesus Christ was here on earth during His ministry ... was He also God at that very same time? Or was He only a human being during His earthly ministry?

While the answer to this question is very clear (yes, Jesus Christ certainly was God while He was here on earth!) and while we will later examine the evidence for this answer, it may be helpful to try to understand certain things which are rather speculative, such as the nature of God.

God wants us to try to understand Him and His ways. In this endeavour to understand I obviously cannot prove that what I am saying is fully correct, but it may still be helpful to consider these questions about the nature of God. So I present the following thoughts for your contemplation and evaluation. See if they help you to have a clearer picture of what it means to be God.

Let's start off by asking a question.

What Is it That Makes God "God"?

We human beings are physical beings, and monkeys and whales are also physical beings. So what is it that separates us human beings from monkeys and all other physical beings?

- 1) Like all other physical beings, we have a physical body.
- 2) But unlike any other physical creature, we human beings also have a mind. That mind is imparted to us through what the Bible calls "the spirit of man which is in him" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Now while the features and the details of the human body distinguish us humans to some degree from all other physical creatures, it is the mind we have that is the really great distinction between us and other creatures. It is really the mind that makes us "human". We can lose a limb and we will still be human; but if we were to lose the spirit in man, then we would cease to be human.

When God wanted to teach the arrogant Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar an important lesson, God reduced Nebuchadnezzar from a human being to being nothing more than a wild animal. God did this by taking the spirit in man away from Nebuchadnezzar for seven years. As God told Nebuchadnezzar in a dream:

"let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him" (Daniel 4:16 AV).

Old Testament Hebrew did not have a specific word for "mind", and so one of the words commonly used to refer to what we in English mean by "mind" is the Hebrew word for "heart". God was telling

Nebuchadnezzar that His mind would be lowered from the human level to the level of a wild animal ... in other words: God would remove the human mind from Nebuchadnezzar for a full seven years.

God achieved this by taking the spirit in man away from Nebuchadnezzar. It follows that during those seven years Nebuchadnezzar was not a human being, even though he outwardly still looked like a human being. Without “the spirit in man” you cannot have a human being, irrespective of what the outward looks and appearance may be. And for seven years Nebuchadnezzar was not a human being.

I realize that this sounds somewhat extreme, but when God said “let a beast’s heart be given unto him”, God was in effect saying “reduce Nebuchadnezzar to being nothing more than an animal”, and an animal is not a human being. So without the spirit in man Nebuchadnezzar was not a human being.

Now this case with Nebuchadnezzar was very clearly a unique exception, which God made to illustrate a point. In all other cases human beings have the spirit in man from birth onwards and, irrespective of how our minds may deteriorate over time, that spirit in man stays with us until we die! As Solomon pointed out ...

“Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7 AV).

The “then” in Ecclesiastes 12:7 refers to “at the time of death”. So the point is: if at the time of death there is no spirit in man within “a living creature” which spirit can return to God, then that “living creature” was not a human being!

There must be a spirit in man which has the potential of returning to God at the time of death in order for that being to be a human being. The spirit in man is the primary identification for a human being. Animals, irrespective of their outward features do not have such a spirit. As Solomon also stated ...

“Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” (Ecclesiastes 3:21 AV).

The Hebrew word here translated as “spirit” (i.e. ruwach) means “breath”. The point is that with an animal there is nothing to go “upwards to God”! At death an animal simply ceases to breathe, with no further potential. But a human being is different from all animals in this regard, that at death there is a spirit that goes upwards to God, who had “given” that spirit at birth (or earlier?).

What identifies us as human beings is not primarily the form and the shape we have. Those are only secondary identifying features. What really first and foremost identifies us as human beings is the human mind we all possess! Put another way, it is the spirit in man that identifies us as human beings rather than our outward physical features.

Now let’s ask the next question: what is it that separates God from other spirit beings?

From what we understand God has a spirit body. And angels also have spirit bodies. Since we human beings were created in the image and likeness of God, it means that to those beings that can see other spirit beings (i.e. angels) God’s spirit body has “the human form”. [Comment: It is actually the other way around ... we humans really have “the God-form”.] But from various people in Old Testament times, who at various times actually saw angels, we know that angels typically also manifested in “the human form”.

So what makes God different from the angels, if angels also have a spirit body which resembles the human form?

If both, God and the angels, have what we know as “the human form and shape”, then it is also not primarily the form and shape of God’s spirit body that distinguishes God from angels, though the brilliance and power and glory and splendor embodied in the person of God (like the sun in its full strength, e.g. Revelation 1:16) undoubtedly sets God apart from all the created spirit beings.

But it is surely the mind within that brilliant spirit body that especially sets God apart from all the angels. The created angels also have minds, but their minds must be on a lower level than God’s mind.

It is first and foremost the mind God has which identifies God as God!

Now without that brilliant spirit body (e.g. if God were to manifest looking like an ordinary human being) God would still be God. Thus, when three “men” appeared unto Abraham without any brilliant bodies, one of whom was the God of the Old Testament, then God was still God. But without that mind God would no longer be God!

Can you understand that it is the mind that defines God’s identity, even as your mind identifies your identity? In the case of identical twins it is easy for other people to mistake the identity when looking at nothing more than the bodies of the two individuals. It is the minds that distinguish and give individual identities to these two people ... with the mind the elder identical twin will always know that he is not the younger one, even if other people looking at him may not know this.

So understand this:

no matter how God may choose to manifest, it is always first and foremost the mind within any such “manifestation” that identifies God as God!

In identifying God we cannot rely on the appearance. Recall that Satan tries to imitate the appearance of a righteous spirit being ... he tries his utmost to present the appearance of “an angel of light” (see 2 Corinthians 11:14), even though he is still Satan. It is the mind within that “angel of light” that unequivocally identifies Satan. And likewise it is the mind that identifies God as God.

When the Apostle Peter presented to Jesus Christ a suggestion that Satan had palmed off on Peter’s mind, Jesus Christ responded to Peter with the words: “get you behind me, Satan” (see Matthew 16:23), because those words Peter had spoken identified the mind of Satan! The words identified Satan, even when those words had come out of Peter’s mouth.

It is God’s mind which identifies God as God. And as long as God has that same mind, no matter how He may choose to appear or to manifest, He will still be God. It is the mind which controls every and all powers at God’s disposal. It is with that mind that God creates all things.

When we human beings want to accomplish something then we actually have to do something physical ... otherwise we are engaging in nothing more than “wishful thinking”. We do not have the power to accomplish things simply by thinking. We have the minds that enable us to think, but it is only through doing something, through acting on those thoughts, that those thoughts can be turned into reality.

But God is different from us. His mind is on an infinitely higher level than are our minds. God can and does accomplish by thinking, by using the mind He has. Thus we see God speaking his thoughts in Genesis chapter 1, and creation comes about. When we see that God can create by simply speaking, then we are seeing a glimpse of what it is that makes God “God” ... it is a mind that can achieve things

by simply thinking!

So God can bring about things by thinking specific thoughts. God has given us human beings minds that can think specific thoughts, but with the limitation that it will require physical actions on our part to turn those thoughts into reality. That is one great chasm between God and us.

This is the kind of thing people will portray in movies ... that someone has magical powers, with the ability to bring things to pass simply by using his mind. But that is nothing more than man trying to play God! In movies people can pretend that someone has such powers, but with God that type of power is not make-believe. God has that type of power.

The angels are somewhere in between God and us human beings ... they can achieve some things (apparently) simply by thinking, but this power and ability must be limited in some ways. For God there are no limits for what God can achieve by doing nothing more than using His mind, but the angels have certain limitations in this regard.

This brings us to the next point.

Learning to Control Our Minds

We human beings are in the process of being groomed and trained to become spirit-born sons and daughters of God. And the way we use our minds has the greatest impact on this process.

God will never change any human being into a spirit-born son or daughter of God, if that person has in their lifetime done nothing more than to learn how to control his or her actions!

This is absolutely vital for us to understand.

Controlling our conduct and our actions (e.g. keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, not killing or stealing or committing adultery, etc.) is important only in as far as it reflects the inner workings of our minds. However, it is also a fact that the identical outward conduct and actions can be achieved by minds thinking in vastly different ways! It follows that when those “correct outward actions” are achieved by a mind that is working in the wrong way, then it has no more value before God than “killing a dog” or “offering swine’s blood” or “blessing an idol” ... i.e. it has no value at all! That’s the point God is making in Isaiah 66:3. Notice ...

“He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations” (Isaiah 66:3 AV).

Keep in mind that “sacrificing a lamb” and “offering an oblation” and “burning incense” are things that people would have done with the thoughts that these things are pleasing to God. Yet God in this verse shows outright contempt for these actions that are supposed to be pleasing to Him. The point is that when the right actions are produced by a wrong mind, then those right actions have no value before God. But do you understand why in such cases the right actions are valueless to God?

God is in the process of training us human beings for an existence with Him in His presence, in which we will be able to achieve and to accomplish things simply by correctly using our minds. That represents incredible power! And that ability will identify us as God’s spirit-born sons and daughters.

The real purpose of all obedience to all of God's laws, which obedience requires physical actions on our part, is to train our minds! The physical obedience is nothing more than the vehicle to achieve this training of the mind. Of and by itself this "vehicle" has no value ... its only value lies in the training effects it has on human minds. It is our minds which God desires and requires us to willingly submit to His way of thinking. God is in the process of creating minds that will operate and function on an even higher level than the minds of the righteous angels of God ... that will function exactly like God's own mind functions.

Let's now examine another question.

What about the Minds of the Angels?

When God created the angels as spirit beings, He gave them very powerful minds. But irrespective of how powerful those minds are, they are on a lower level than God's own mind. Whether all the angels started out with minds that were equal, or whether some angels and other created spirit beings started out with minds that were more powerful than the minds God gave to other angels is unclear. What is clear is that now the minds of all the created spirit beings are not equal! Now there are very distinctly some angels that have a better and greater understanding of God's mind than all the other angels.

Thus:

A) Those angels that followed Satan in his rebellion against God, and in the process became demons, have the poorest grasp of all regarding what the mind of God is really like, how God thinks and what is important to God, etc..

B) Satan himself now also only has a very poor understanding of the mind of God. He does not really understand how God thinks, etc.. As we are told in Ezekiel 28, he corrupted his wisdom.

"Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee" (Ezekiel 28:17 AV).

Now "the wisdom" that Satan had possessed before his rebellion was that he had had a better understanding of God's mind than most other angels and created spirit beings. In rebelling he lost this wisdom. While Satan obviously knows that he now has access to far less power than he had access to before his rebellion, it is unlikely that he grasps that he also has far less wisdom than he previously possessed. But Satan no longer correctly understands how God's mind functions and works, something he had apparently understood very clearly before his rebellion.

C) Amongst the righteous angels of God, there also are different levels or degrees of understanding God's mind, with some angels having a better grasp of God's mind than other angels. It follows that those angels who have the greatest understanding of God's mind, of how God thinks and of what God will approve of and what it is that God desires to accomplish with certain instructions He has given, those are the angels God will entrust with the greatest responsibilities amongst the angels.

We see this referred to by the angel Gabriel when he talked to Daniel. Notice what Gabriel said ...

"But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince" (Daniel 10:21 AV).

Do you grasp what Gabriel was here saying to Daniel? The “scripture of truth” reflects God’s thinking, God’s mind. And Gabriel was here saying:

“There is nobody (implied is in the angelic realm) who understands God’s mind as well as I do, except for the archangel Michael.”

So there are two angels (Michael and Gabriel) who understand God’s mind and God’s thinking to a greater degree than any of the other righteous angels. And so we see that God has entrusted these two angels with key responsibilities ... Michael is the captain or general over the whole angelic host or army, and Gabriel is the one who has been entrusted by God with the most important messages that needed to be conveyed to human beings ... Gabriel gave prophetic information to Daniel and Gabriel also appeared to people leading up to the birth of Jesus Christ.

So not all angels are “equal” when it comes to how well they understand God’s mind and God’s thinking.

God is in the process of building a Family, the Family of God. Put another way, God is in the process of reproducing Himself (actually “Themselves”, in reference to God the Father and to Jesus Christ). Now God could instantaneously create physical beings and also spirit beings. What God could not create instantaneously is His own mind! The process by which some of the created angels became “righteous” while others became “unrighteous” (those who rebelled with Satan) apparently came fairly close to that goal for the righteous angels, but without actually fully achieving that goal of reproducing God’s mind. To fully achieve that goal of reproducing the mind of God in another living entity is reserved for the training process we human beings are going through.

Understand that at the end of the training program for those who will be in the first resurrection, that goal of reproducing the mind of God will have been achieved to an even greater degree than has been the case in the creation of the righteous angels of God ... the minds of every person who will be in the first resurrection will end up having a greater and better grasp of God’s mind and His thinking and planning and His motivations, etc., than the minds of any of the righteous angels of God.

Furthermore, the minds of all those in the first resurrection will also have a better understanding of God’s mind and God’s thinking than any of those who become a part of the Family of God after that time (i.e. those from the millennium and from the Great White Throne Judgment period).

So the key to identifying God in any manifestation is always the mind in that particular manifestation.

Let’s see if we can make the importance of the mind somewhat clearer.

God Forces Us to Use Our Minds

Let’s look again at Daniel 10:21 in a bit more detail.

“But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince” (Daniel 10:21 AV).

The Rotherham translation of this verse reads:

when it comes to understanding God’s mind and God’s thinking, there is no one who

understands God as well as I do, except for Michael.

Now let's ask a question:

why is it that some angels don't understand God's thinking as clearly as do Michael and Gabriel?

Is it that God is somehow not a good communicator? Has God not made Himself clear to all the angels? Why is it that all the angels don't understand God's thinking equally clearly?

Is this perhaps something that God actually planned?

Before we answer this question, let's come to the human level. God has given us His written Word, the Bible. And so we human beings read the Bible and we then come to hundreds of different conclusions regarding what God means and what it is that God is trying to convey to us, from the conclusions that some other people reach when they read exactly the same Scriptures. Could God not have spelled everything out more plainly so that all this confusion of interpretations could be avoided?

Or is this perhaps something that God actually planned?

As already discussed, physical literal obedience to all of God's laws is certainly important. But such obedience is only of value when it is produced by a mind that is working the correct way, the way that God desires a human mind to work.

We have already looked at Isaiah 66:3. In the past in most cases we stopped after reading verse 2 ...

“For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2 AV).

This verse shows that it is the working of the mind that God looks to. And so the next verse then shows the contrast of physical obedience coming from a mind that is not right before God.

“He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations” (Isaiah 66:3 AV).

When people do not submit their minds fully to God, then their literal obedience is as contemptible to God as “offering swine's blood” and as “blessing an idol” ... God despises such “obedience”!

But the people bringing such obedience to God would not perceive that their compliance with God's laws and requirements is in fact contemptible to God. They are likely to be thinking that they are “okay with God”. They are the ones who are likely to be speechless when God points out to them that they don't actually have “a wedding garment” (see Matthew 22:11-12).

So the point is this:

God inspired his word, the Bible, to be written in such a way that we are constantly forced to use our minds to make decisions! And depending on what decisions we make, it shows God whether

or not our minds are right before him!

God designed the entire human life experience to be a testing ground for exposing to Him the inner workings of human minds. So God gave ten commandments, and we ourselves are forced to decide how to apply those commandments in an endless variety of situations. As we make those decisions day after day, the inner workings of our minds become very apparent. And God will very quickly detect such things as: reluctant obedience, fearful obedience, half-hearted obedience, ignorant obedience, accidental obedience, rebellious obedience, deceitful obedience, pressured obedience, selfish obedience, etc.. The only kind of obedience that is of value before God is the Isaiah 66:2 obedience.

To bring inner thoughts and motivations out into the open (think of Hebrews 4:12) God has given us principles, and we have to apply them. Now if Jesus Christ had not explained this, would you and I have on our own accord come to realize that when God says:

“don’t kill”, then He really wants us to not even hate someone;

“don’t commit adultery”, then He wants us to not even entertain the wrong thoughts; etc.?

Would we ourselves readily detect the motivation and the intent behind every instruction that God has given, or do we need God to spell everything out to us in the last detail?

Or would we be like the man who sang the song titled Watching All the Girls Go By, who said: “brother, you can’t go to jail for what you’re thinking”? He wasn’t about to control his thoughts, was he?

When God tells us to keep His Sabbaths holy, how do we apply that in a thousand different situations and circumstances? You and I are the ones who have to make decisions, and God planned it that way! Compliance to a list of do’s and don’t’s does not really reveal how a mind works; but requiring a mind to constantly make decisions based on principles that have been stated does reveal the workings of a mind.

Will the mind say:

“God nowhere says that I can’t do this, so therefore it must be okay for me to do”?

“I know it is the Sabbath, but under these specific circumstances I am confident that God would allow or even expect me to do such and such”?

“Since God nowhere says that I can do this, I would like further confirmation from various principles before I engage in this activity or conduct”? etc.

Questions like these will show God how our minds work.

God gave the angels two commandments and He gave us human beings ten commandments. All other laws and instructions fall within the bounds and the parameters of those commandments. Depending on how we apply the principles of those commandments to every circumstance in our lives, it shows God whether our minds are selflessly or selfishly motivated, whether our motivations are pure and sincere or whether they are insincere and hypocritical; whether our minds are self-sufficient or whether we are constantly seeking to understand His thinking more fully; whether or not we are prepared to compromise our consciences; etc..

And depending on how we use our minds and the decisions we reach and act on, so our understanding of God’s ways and God’s thinking either grows or diminishes. For example, King David had an

excellent understanding of God's thinking when he realized that under his circumstances of duress God would clearly approve of him eating "the showbread". If I had eaten the showbread under those circumstances, I would have had an extremely guilty conscience because I would have been convinced that God would see my action as being presumptuous. David clearly back then had a better understanding of God's thinking than I would have had (if I did not have the benefit of the biblical record of this event to look to).

How our minds work is exposed especially clearly when we act boldly and confidently in the things we do. David was bold and confident when he confronted Goliath, and are we bold and confident when we reach a decision regarding a specific course of action we believe we should take? At times there can be a very fine line between being bold in a godly way and being presumptuous ... and God will always see which of these applies to us. That is why He has forced us to constantly make decisions, which reveal to Him how our minds think and reason.

It is the working of the mind that is of the utmost importance to God!

So God forced the angels to use their minds, in order to expose their thinking to Him. And God forces us to use our minds in order to expose our thinking to God. And so we are told:

"...to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17 AV).

and:

"...whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23 AV).

These verses (James 4:17 and Romans 14:23) show that how our minds work is far more important than the actual physical obedience that may be involved. A mind that is willing to compromise is never acceptable to God, even when that mind complies literally with specific instructions and laws.

Let's get back to looking at Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ Was God While in the Flesh!

When Jesus Christ was born to Mary, He was a human baby that had been supernaturally conceived. He was already the Son of God. But at that point He only had the mind of an infant. As He grew, so His mind expanded with an ever-growing vocabulary and understanding. And as His mind expanded, so it gained access to the memory of His past existence with God the Father. By age 12 years it had already advanced to such a degree that He realized that He was the Son of God and that He had come to this earth for a very specific purpose ... to do the will of God His Father. As He worded it at that time, "I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49).

From that age onwards, if not already from earlier, He was fully aware of His real identity. By the time He started His ministry, He had total recall of His past existence. He also had the identical mind to the one He had possessed before He became a human being. This is also evidenced by His interaction with Satan after Christ had fasted for 40 days ... He identified Satan correctly and without the slightest hesitation, because He recognized Satan from His past dealings with him. And He instantly recognized Satan's mind and how it works. We, on the other hand, frequently struggle to correctly identify Satan at the very start when he first tries to influence us ... we typically only recognize Satan after he has already managed to lead us astray to some degree or other. That is because Satan mostly disguises his initial approaches to us with what looks harmless or perhaps even noble; he only reveals his real motivations

and intentions after we have swallowed his initial “good and noble” appeals. By then we are often already hooked and we will only be able to extricate ourselves with a certain amount of pain and suffering and repentance.

But Christ recognized Satan instantly, because He knew Satan’s mind from His previous contacts with Satan.

[Comment: Recognizing Satan correctly is not the same as resisting temptations. Simply because we correctly recognize that we are being tempted to sin, that does not in any way make it easier to resist that temptation. We still have to exercise character and to act on what we know to be right and to resist doing what we know to be wrong. I say this because simply correctly recognizing Satan did not make it any easier for Jesus Christ to resist the temptations that Satan confronted Him with ... Christ still had to exercise His own free will to do what is right and to resist doing what is wrong. But it is also a fact that the closer we draw to God through prayer, study, meditation and fasting, the more readily we will recognize Satan’s presence in any potential situation that may confront us.]

So understand this:

It is not the body (i.e. a spirit-composed body as opposed to a physical body) that identifies God. Whether Christ was in a physical body or whether He was in a spirit body is not the criterion as to whether or not He was God. The real criterion for establishing whether or not Jesus Christ was God during His earthly ministry is to establish the mind that was within that body during His ministry. The body which housed that mind is only of secondary importance.

Let me give you a speculation, which may not be correct at all. Here it is:

Jesus Christ appeared to Abraham in the form of a physical man. Joshua also saw Jesus Christ in the form of a physical man in Joshua 5:13-15. I would speculate that the features Abraham and Joshua saw were the same ones Jesus Christ had when He started His ministry at age 30 years, so that if Abraham and Joshua had been there when Christ started His ministry, they would have recognized Him immediately from their past contact with Him. Or perhaps Christ appeared with different physical features? But the point to bear in mind is this:

Abraham saw a man; Joshua saw a man; and during His ministry the people who had contact with Him saw a man! I don’t believe that it is the form and shape of that “man” which determined whether or not the individual was God! It is the mind within the man that Abraham saw, and the mind within the man that Joshua saw, and the mind within the man people during Christ’s ministry saw that is the deciding factor that in each of those cases that individual was indeed God!

I guess what I am asking you to do is to change your concept of what it is that makes God “God”. You are probably used to thinking that the difference between God and man is that God is an immortal spirit being whereas a man is a mortal physical being. And that is certainly correct. But because God has the ability to manifest in a physical human body, therefore this difference in bodies cannot be the primary distinction between God and man. The primary distinction has to be the mind which inhabits and controls that body.

[Comment: In the above paragraph I do not mean to imply that you don’t realize that God is the Creator, the Lawgiver and Sustainer of life, etc.. You obviously do realize these things. In the above statements I am merely trying to bring things down to what we would generally perceive as the most basic differences.]

Recall that “the man” Jesus Christ said:

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58 AV).

It wasn't the physical body that was present there that preceded the birth of Abraham. It was the mind within that physical body that was the same one that had existed before Abraham was ever born, but back then obviously in a different body, a spirit body.

And according to Christ's own words here in John 8:58 the mind Christ had during His ministry predated the time of Abraham. This proves that Christ during His ministry had the identical mind which He had possessed when He was the God of the Old Testament. This leaves no other possibility but to conclude that during His ministry Jesus Christ was indeed and without question God!

Let me spell this out very plainly:

The implications, effect and consequences of Jesus Christ's statement “before Abraham was I am” are exactly the same as if Jesus Christ had said:

“I can recall when I went out to meet Abraham, and I can recall when I created Adam and Eve, and I can recall when I appeared to Moses in the burning bush and when I led Israel out of Egypt, I can recall when I ... etc., etc.”

All of the above statements amount to exactly the same thing as Christ saying “before Abraham was I am”.

An individual is made up of a body plus a mind. With the body Jesus Christ was human during His ministry, but with the mind He possessed He was at the same time God! The only way in which Christ was “more than human” is in the fact that He possessed a mind that infinitely transcends the normal human mind. His body was subject to all the forces and pressures our bodies are subject to (susceptibility to hunger, pain, tiredness, etc.) and He was forced to constantly make decisions as to how to respond to those forces. The only way in which Christ during His ministry was “less than God” is the fact that the mind of God (i.e. Christ's mind) was bound up in a physical mortal body and subject to all temptations, instead of being in an immortal spirit body.

If you can get away from the idea that the type of body (i.e. composed of spirit or composed of physical matter) identifies whether an individual is God or whether the individual is only human, if you can grasp that the mind within a specific body determines the identity of that individual ... then it should be totally clear to you that Jesus Christ was indeed God during His earthly ministry. The mind Jesus Christ possessed during His ministry, the mind that knew that it predated the time of Abraham, is clear proof that Jesus Christ was indeed God. There is no other possibility! Christ's mind was identical in every respect to the mind within the person who met Abraham before the destruction of Sodom; Christ's mind was identical in every respect to the mind that had dealt with Moses and which led Israel out of Egypt. And that was the mind of God!

And with the mind Jesus Christ had during His ministry He performed miracles, which are acts of God (like giving sight to a man born blind, walking on water, multiplying food for over 5000 people, etc.), yet always being fully subject to the will of God the Father over all of His actions.

The only possible way for Jesus Christ to have been both, God and man, at the same time was to house the mind of God within the physical mortal body of a man. There had to be one component that identified Him as God and another component that identified Him as man ... the Son of God and the Son of man at the same time. The only other alternative (i.e. to have housed the mind of a man within the body of God)

is clearly unfeasible. So this is the only way for Christ to have been God and man at the same time. The supernatural begetting of Jesus Christ within the womb of Mary imparted the mind of God to that human baby. That was God's contribution to the birth of Christ, to impart the mind of the Father to the Son, rather than imparting the physical features of the Father to the Son.

Let's now look at another question.

Were There Men Before Adam?

Scientists find bones and skeletons and fossils and then claim that human beings existed long before the time of Adam, who lived approximately 6000 years ago. What is the truth here?

If you have understood the things I have explained thus far, the answer to this question should be easy.

A man, a human being, is defined not by the form and shape of his body, but by the presence of a mind, which is imparted to the individual by what we know as "the spirit in man".

I realize that there are enormous unjustified claims out there about the supposed antiquity of human beings. I realize that the claims and assertions for the antiquity of human beings can all be flawed simply by considering all the facts. But even apart from that, the criterion is not whether or not some fossil "looks like a human being". The real and the only criterion for establishing the existence of human life is to prove that the beings whose bones are being examined by scientists actually had the spirit in man! And that is something no scientist has ever been able to prove.

So people can argue about whether some bone fragment is 4000 years old or whether it is 50 000 years old, and they can try to argue their point of view, but they can never prove that their bone fragment belonged to a being that had the spirit in man. And without proving the presence of the spirit in man it is impossible to prove "human status".

To be totally clear: even if the person whose bones are being examined had "looked" as human as king Nebuchadnezzar, without the spirit in man that being would not have been "a human being". Understand that for 7 years Nebuchadnezzar was not a human being, no matter how "human" he looked during those 7 years. For those 7 years Nebuchadnezzar was nothing more than a wild animal. When Nebuchadnezzar says that at the end of 7 years he lifted up his eyes unto heaven and his understanding returned to him (Daniel 4:34), he is saying that at the end of 7 years God restored the spirit in man to him and he was once again capable of functioning as a human being.

So whether really old bones and skeletons "look human" or not is avoiding the real issue. Without the spirit in man any physical creature is not a human being. Is it any wonder that Satan is out to destroy the minds of people in any and every way that he possibly can? Because that is the way to destroy the real human potential.

Adam is called "the first man" in 1 Corinthians 15:45, and so irrespective of whether or not some "human looking bone" predates Adam, no creature before Adam possessed the spirit in man, and thus there were no human beings before Adam. A human being is identified by the presence of the spirit in man, not by the outward form and shape of the body.

Let's now examine one other aspect.

Only God Is to Be Worshipped

It is a very powerful experience for a man to be visited by an angel from God. [Comment: This is my

surmising and I am not speaking from personal experience. I have not had any dreams or visions! I say this lest someone reads a wrong deduction into this statement.] And so we see that at times such men were moved to the point of wanting to worship these spirit beings who had visited them. For example, the Apostle John wrote ...

“And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, see thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10 AV).

Now consider: John had a very great deal of understanding. He had seen a vision with both, God the Father and also Jesus Christ in it. Yet here he was so moved by the whole experience that he was ready to worship this angel. The angel tells him very clearly to not do this.

Yet a short while later he felt moved to try to do the same thing again. Notice ...

“And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, see thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Revelation 22:8-9 AV).

Notice the slight difference here. John had obviously learned something. And so now he wants to worship God, but before the feet of this angel. And again the angel states very clearly: see that you do it not! The point is that we are not to worship God before the feet of any other person or individual ... not before the feet of any man and not before the feet of any angel.

No servant of God and no righteous angel of God will allow anyone to worship them, or even to worship God before their feet. Only God is to be worshipped.

But in the New Testament we see Jesus Christ repeatedly allowing people to worship Him without in any way trying to stop them from doing so. Such worshipping of Jesus Christ is only justified by the fact that Jesus Christ was indeed God while He was here on earth.

Notice these verses ...

“Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2 AV).

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11 AV).

The wise men very clearly stated their intentions. And they worshipped the young child. This was clearly acceptable to God, as we see no rebuke of any kind in this context. So from birth Jesus Christ was worthy of being worshipped. That was only possible because He was God at that very same time.

Later, at age 30 years, Jesus Christ Himself said:

“Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the lord

thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10 AV).

Now did Jesus Christ here mean that only God the Father is to be worshipped? For a start, Jesus Christ was basically quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13. Back at the time when Moses wrote Deuteronomy, Israel did not even realize that there were two distinct members in the God Family. And the intent of that verse in Deuteronomy was to command Israel to worship the God with whom they had contact, who was Jesus Christ.

Now while the primary intent when Moses wrote this verse was to command Israel to worship Jesus Christ, the only God they knew and had any contact with, the principle obviously also applies to any other God who is over Jesus Christ (i.e. God the Father). But they couldn't really worship God the Father until after Jesus Christ had come to reveal the Father to them.

The fact that we see examples of people worshipping Jesus Christ later in His ministry makes clear that the intent of the statement in Matthew 4:10 is that we are to only worship those who are “God”. At this time that means both, God the Father and also Jesus Christ. After the time of the first resurrection, this will also include worshipping all those who will become sons and daughters of God at the first resurrection. As we are told in Revelation 3:9 ...

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee” (Revelation 3:9 AV).

That's the identical thing which John was told not to do before the feet of the angel in Revelation 22. Yet such worship will be perfectly acceptable before the feet of those in the first resurrection.

People may argue that the worship spoken of in Revelation 3:9 is directed at God the Father and is only being carried out “before the feet” of those in the first resurrection. But the point is this: any worshipping, even when it is directed towards God the Father, inevitably reflects to some degree upon those before whose feet it is being expressed! You cannot worship God before the feet of Satan, because if you did so (as is the case in various of this world's churches) some of that worship would reflect on Satan. In plain English: a pagan cathedral is simply not the place for you to get down on your knees to worship the true God, because the spirit that inhabits that cathedral is not of God!

Furthermore, notice that Jesus Christ said that He Himself will make people do this ... He Himself will make people worship before the feet of those in the first resurrection. If the intent is that that particular worshipping be directed towards God the Father, then why would Jesus Christ insist that it be done before the feet of those who will be in the first resurrection ... why would Jesus Christ select that particular setting for directing worship towards God the Father ... why not just direct people to worship before His own (i.e. Christ's) feet?

Irrespective of how we may look at this statement, when Jesus Christ states in Revelation 3:9 that people will worship before the feet of those in the first resurrection, then a certain amount of that worship inevitably reflects on those before whose feet that worshipping will take place.

Here are some examples of Christ being worshipped during His earthly ministry.

“And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Matthew 8:2 AV).

“While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live” (Matthew 9:18 AV).

“Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (Matthew 14:33 AV).

“Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me” (Matthew 15:25 AV).

“Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of him” (Matthew 20:20 AV).

These verses prove that Jesus Christ had to be God at that point in time in order to be eligible to being worshipped. They also show that Jesus Christ is included in the intent of Matthew 4:10.

Let’s look at one verse that people frequently misunderstand, because they read something into this verse that is neither implied nor intended. That verse is Matthew 19:17.

MATTHEW 19:17 EXPLAINED

“And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17 AV).

It always amazes me to see the totally unwarranted deductions some people read into this verse. Let’s examine it.

- 1) Did Christ say: don’t call me “good”? No, He did not say this!
- 2) Did Christ then at least insinuate that He should not be called “good”? No, He did not at all insinuate this!
- 3) So what was Christ actually doing in this verse? He was asking the man a question! He was not giving the man an instruction regarding how the man was to address Him! He simply asked the man a question.
- 4) What else did Christ do in this verse? He explained to whom the word “good” may be correctly applied! The word “good” may only be correctly applied to God! It follows that whenever we call any man “good”, we are elevating that man to the level of God.
- 5) Only then did Christ answer the man’s question from the previous verse. To have access to eternal life we must keep the commandments of God.

So let’s summarize this verse:

This young man very flippantly used the word “good” in addressing Jesus Christ, without really considering the full implications inherent in applying that word “good” to any man. So Jesus Christ asked him: “Do you realize what you are actually saying when you address Me with the word “good” ... that you are in effect calling Me “God”? The young man had obviously not really considered the ramifications of his use of the word “good”. So Christ was pointing out to the man: “do you actually realize that you are calling Me god when you use the word ‘good’ in addressing Me? I am not saying that you should not call Me ‘Good Master’, but I want you to be aware of what you are saying, instead of just engaging in meaningless flattery.”

To call someone “good” is really another form of worship! Now when people would fall down before the feet of an individual, they themselves obviously knew that they were engaging in the act of worshipping. But when they didn’t fall down before a person, and merely used the flattering form of address “Good Master” to speak to the person, they themselves would usually not have thought that they were worshipping the person they were addressing as “good Master”. Those two are actually the same thing ... both are expressions of worship.

I suspect that if this young man had actually fallen down before Jesus Christ to worship Him and then used the words “good Master”, that Jesus Christ would not have asked him this question ... because saying “good Master” to someone and kneeling in worship before that person go together ... they are two different ways of expressing the same feelings. But we have to correctly understand to whom the word “good” may be applied.

Next, when Jesus Christ said: “there is none good but one, that is God”, He was not speaking about the number of individuals that are good. He was speaking about a group or category of individuals ... only those who are “God”. During Old Testament times Israel was only aware of one Being in this category; since Christ came to reveal the Father we today know that there are currently two Beings in this category; at the time of the first resurrection another 144,000 individuals will join this category, and eventually multiple millions more will join this category. All those who will be “God” will also be “good”.

Let’s compare the wording in the following two verses:

The wording in Matthew 4:10 reads: you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.

The wording of Matthew 19:17 reads: there is none good but one, that is God.

These statements run along the same vein with “Him only” in Matthew 4:10 and with “none good but one” in Matthew 19:17. The subsequent statements in Matthew’s gospel that we have already looked at make clear that “Him only” includes Jesus Christ also being worshipped; and likewise “none good but one” includes Jesus Christ also being in this category of “good”.

Jesus Christ did not say to the man: don’t call Me good. This is simply an unjustified deduction that many people have read into this verse. What Christ was really getting at was: Don’t use empty flattery when you talk to Me. When you call Me “good”, you need to understand what you are actually saying, that you are in effect calling Me “God”. Is that what you really mean or is it just empty flattery?

Consider the alternative for those who believe that Christ meant to tell this man to not call Him good. Notice what Jesus told His disciples in John 13:13 ...

“Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am” (John 13:13 AV).

And at another occasion ...

“Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the son of God” (Matthew 14:33 AV).

So it was perfectly acceptable and even desirable for people to address Jesus Christ as “Master” and as “Lord” and as “the Son of God”, just so long as they didn’t use the word “good”, because that would have been going too far, right? I speak as a fool!

What kind of “Master” do you think Jesus Christ was ... a bad one or a good one? What kind of “Lord” do you think Jesus Christ was ... a bad one or a good one? What kind of “Son of God” was Jesus Christ ... a bad one or a good one? If it is desirable to call Christ “Master” and “Lord” and “the Son of God”, why would it be wrong to call Him “Good Master”?

Can you see the utter absurdity of trying to withhold the word “good” from also applying to Jesus Christ when such titles as “Lord” and “Master” and “Son of God” so very obviously applied to Him? On what grounds could the word “good” possibly be withheld from also applying to Jesus Christ? Was there anything about Jesus Christ and His character that was “not good”?

In Matthew 19:17 Jesus Christ was not saying “don’t call me good”. Christ was really saying: “don’t use empty flattery, because when you call any man ‘good’ you are in effect calling him ‘God’. Yes, I am indeed ‘a Good Master’ because I am the Son of God. But you need to understand what you are saying.” And we today should not use the expression “my good man”, which you can hear fairly commonly used by people in England in ordinary conversations ... it is just a very flippant use of the word “good”.

Now let’s examine one more area, and that is the importance of faith in any relationship with God.

Why Faith Is So Important to God

Earlier I mentioned that God accomplishes things by thinking the right thoughts. We human beings accomplish by acting on our thoughts ... our thoughts alone are not enough.

So God’s whole way of life depends on faith. God accomplishes things through faith ... God thinks the right thoughts and the right things take place as a result of God thinking those right thoughts. Understand that in Genesis chapter 1 God spoke those thoughts for our benefit ... had God simply thought “let the earth bring forth grass ...” (see Genesis 1:11) without actually speaking those words then the earth would also have brought forth grass and all the other plants. It is not the speaking that accomplished the creation but the thought processes underlying that speaking that produced the creation. And that whole process embodies the essence of faith.

Now on our part that faith is manifested when our “faithful thoughts” are accompanied by speaking those thoughts out loud, because such speaking represents a commitment on a higher level than mere “wishful thinking” ... we are not yet “Gods”!

Notice what Jesus Christ explained to His disciples ...

“And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matthew 17:20 AV).

There is far more in this statement by Jesus Christ than most of us tend to realize. For a start, what does the phrase “nothing shall be impossible to you” mean to you? Isn’t this just another way of saying: everything can be accomplished through faith? Why did Christ say this? And did Christ really mean that it only takes the minutest quantity of real faith (represented by a grain of mustard seed) to accomplish everything? What about someone like God who has an enormous quantity of faith at His disposal, trillions upon trillions of times the quantity represented by a mustard seed ... what will such faith enable God to accomplish?

You have never moved a physical mountain and I have never moved a physical mountain. Now we can

downplay the magnitude of such an event by saying that some things are even greater miracles (and that is usually presented as a cop-out because we know we can't really move mountains ourselves), but the bottom line is this: if someone would, by exercising faith, be able to move the Halfdome Rock from Yosemite National Park into San Francisco Bay, that would be an enormous and staggering miracle!

Have you ever wondered why it is impossible to please God without faith (see Hebrews 11:6)? In the presence of God we will not accomplish by working with our hands and our legs; in the presence of God we will accomplish things by using our minds! And faith will translate our right thinking into reality ... good things will come to pass when we use our minds correctly and wisely, like God would use His mind. The faith at our disposal then will not be limited to the size of a grain of mustard seed; we will have access to enormous amounts of faith. And it is "on faith" that God is going to give us access to such enormous power ... based on how we have conducted our lives, God is going to have "the faith" that when He changes us into spirit-born sons in His Family, we will always use those powers only in full agreement with His wishes and desires.

Faith is the glue that will bind the Family of God together. We must have absolute faith that God is always motivated by a desire to do whatever is best for us. And God has to have the faith that we will never misuse the powers He is going to make available to us. The entire family structure of the Family of God will revolve around faith.

God had in good faith given Satan an enormous amount of power, together with certain responsibilities over one third of all the angels. When Satan rebelled against God, he destroyed the faith that God had previously placed in him. Satan destroyed a relationship between himself and God, which relationship had been based on faith. And that faith-based relationship can never be reestablished. In the presence of God all relationships will be based on faith.

Jesus Christ exercised that faith time and again when He performed miracles. Faith is one of the most important components of life with God. I realize that the following statement is an oxymoron, since there is no "blood" in the presence of God, but perhaps it can convey a clearer picture. It really boils down to this:

faith is "the lifeblood" of an existence in the presence of God!

In the Family of God faith is going to be a two-way street. We must have absolute faith in every judgment and decision that God the Father will make. And God has to have the faith that He can indeed trust us absolutely, because there will be no restraints on us then ... God is not going to be keeping us on a leash to reel us in when we get out of line ... God will have to have the faith that we

will never get out of line.

I doubt very much that we really grasp the absolutely enormous importance of faith in the relationships that God has mapped out for all future eternity! The statement that it is impossible to please God without faith only just barely scratches the surface of what is really at stake when we talk about what it is that God is really looking for in us.

To get back to Jesus Christ: not only did Jesus Christ obey God totally and completely during His ministry; but He also demonstrated that absolute degree of having faith in God the Father, which represents the target that we are to strive for. I don't remotely have faith to the degree that Jesus Christ did, and very likely you don't either? But Christ left us an example, a goal to aim for.

It is never a case of faith or physical obedience to all of God's laws. Both are important, and sincere and

whole-hearted obedience to God's laws is a way for us to demonstrate our faith. But of the two (i.e. faith and literal obedience) faith is by far the greater! Living in obedience to all of God's laws represents the bottom rung of the ladder in establishing any relationship with God. But the rungs above that are living by faith!

Living by faith is practical training for later living within the Family of God. Living by faith goes far above and beyond obedience to the ten commandments. And living by faith will ultimately regulate the entire existence of all those in the eternal Family of God (i.e. for future eternity). Without absolute faith on the part of every participating member the relationship God has mapped out for all future eternity would not be possible. That is the vital role of faith in the plan God has devised.

And we need to have faith in God now. Jesus Christ is God right now; He was God during His ministry; and He was God before He became a human being; He has always been God together with God the Father. The Scriptures make this quite clear. And I rather doubt that God the Father will give a part in that future eternity to anyone who rejects Jesus Christ's part in that relationship for all past eternity. Such rejection is an affront and an insult to Jesus Christ and to the sacrifice He brought on our behalf.

Frank W. Nelte